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SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR

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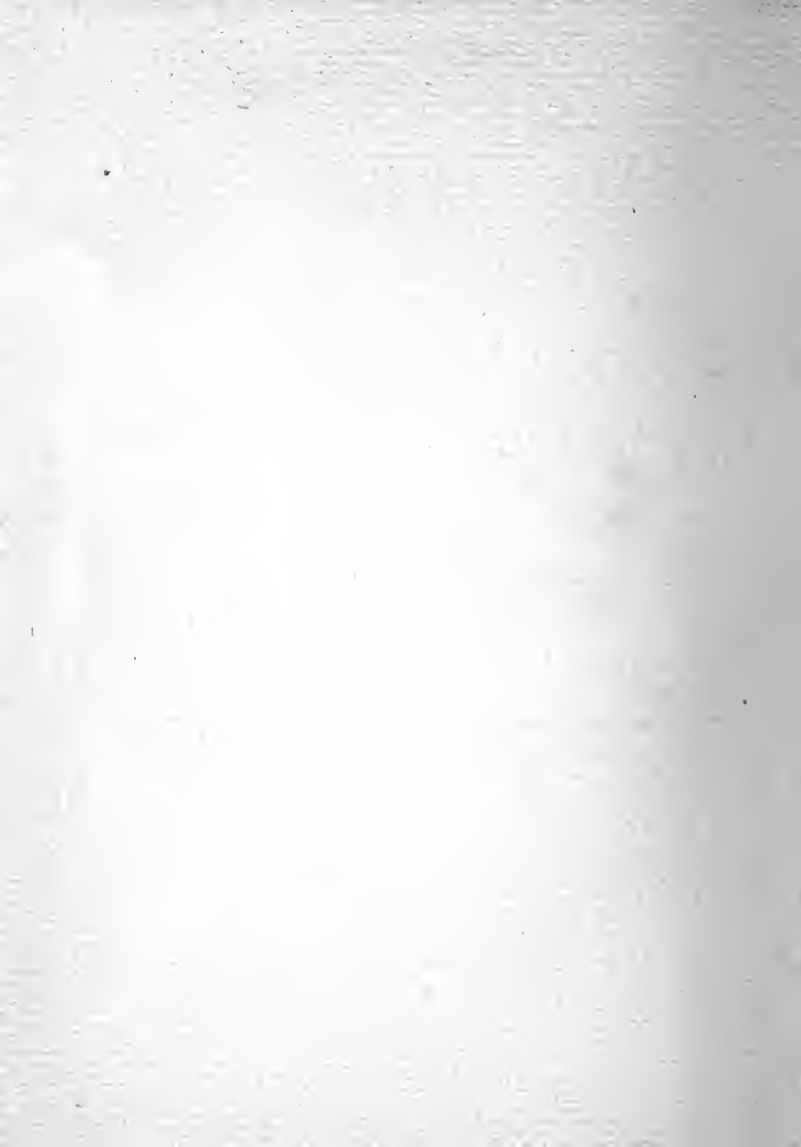


SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR

NINA MURDOCH

SYDNEY :
WILLIAM BROOKS & Co. LTD.

1915.



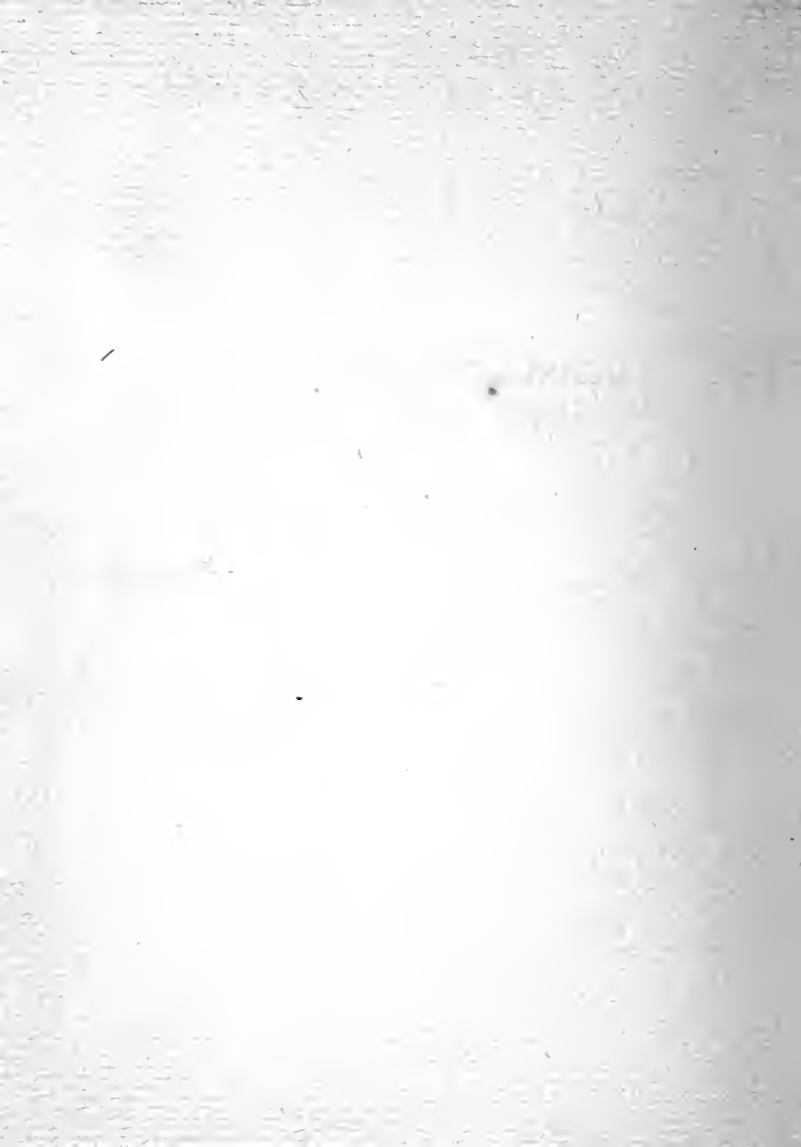
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**SONGS OF THE
OPEN AIR.**



SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR.

TO YOU.

WHEN the days of wooing are over and done,
And we twain loving at last are wed,
I shall not crave for the sweet things said
When love between us was scarce begun,
Nor weep for the glamor that once we spun
With soft, slow kisses and dreams for thread.

When the wild first joy of your loving dies
Like the song of a bird grown weary at last,
Tho' desire of me from your eyes be cast
I shall find no cause for the dolor of sighs—
Does a hunter strive when he holds the prize,
Or a runner speed when the goal is past?

And you that kneeling would kiss my feet
Know even as I that delights o'erta'en
Faint and fade, and with use are slain;
And the faith of woman is blind conceit
Who deems the fruit of her lips as sweet
When her lover and she are no longer twain.

SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR.

I dare to dream of a mating sealed,
Unseen as the wedding of sea and wind,
Yet past disputing—'twixt brain and mind.
For a kiss between us no power can wield,
And what delight can caresses yield
Like a word unspoken and yet divined?

So the change between us ordained of fate
Will bear toward me no hurt or wrong.
I shall laugh and make it a theme for song
If I lose the lover and find the mate,
Till my heart atune with it early and late,
Makes splendour of music my whole life long.

JOIE DE VIVRE.

O, I have seen a cobweb when day was scarce begun,
A flimsy fairy wondrous thing bejewelled in the
sun;

It might have graced the shoulders of a moonbeam thro'
the night,

The gleaming dew upon it was a dream of such delight
That none who saw could e'er forget the marvel of it
there

A symphony in colours—a poem in the air!

And I have watched cicadas fly upward to the blue,
On gauzy wings like Autumn leaves with brown bars
thro'.

The splendour of the morning set them stirring in the
trees

And waked a madness in them with the first small breeze,
Till the day was gold about them, and the air grew rife
With their wild exultant voices thridding Life! Life!
Life!

O, I have ridden homeward on a frosty night in June,
When hoofs upon the metal road rang sharply to a tune,

And the mangroves by the river with the ti-tree clumps
were set
Against the evening's amber robe in darkest silhouette;
While the blood went beating wildly for the keenness of
the night,
And the still strange beauty of the sheer moonlight.

And I have sped in summer across a silver beach,
Where wind and wave on shining feet ran swiftly each
to each;
The curling of the breakers was a wonder wrought in
jade
That split and turned to opal as the light foam sprayed.
And O, 'tis I have laughed aloud for very ecstasy
In the flowing soft embraces of the cold green sea!

O, I have known the perfume of the wild flowers on the
heath,
And the sound of nesting songsters in the bracken
underneath;
The breeze has laid her fingers on my eyelids, dancing
by,
And I have felt the glory of the earth and sea and sky—
So, if I passed to-morrow in Death's worst agony,
Why, who of you that know me, would dare to pity me?

PIONEERS.

OUT of the way of the wind and the weather
We twain lie in the earth together;
Murmur not, nor laugh, nor weep,
Held in thrall to a dreamless sleep.

Rain and sunshine have served to harden
The face of this dear deserted garden,
Till none but we would ever know
The love that tended it long ago.

They have builded a cairn of stones above us—
And cypress trees that have grown to love us,
Dreaming of others long since dead,
Throw sombre shadows across our bed.

Passing breezes ruffle and billow
The hanging trails of a weeping willow
That whispers low to the babbling creek,
Hushed and seeming afraid to speak,

Here in the presence of us that slumber,
Caring nor knowing the infinite number
Of days and nights that pass us by
Under the broad cerulean sky.

SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR.

And as we laboured shoulder to shoulder,
So we rest—From our limbs that moulder
And yield them back to the friendly earth,
Many a flower takes joyous birth.

The berries are red on the briar-roses,
The wild convolvulus opens and closes
Its purple cup to the summer sun,
But the changing seasons with us are one.

Out of the way of the wind and the weather,
We twain lie in the earth together;
Sow no longer, nor bind, nor reap,
Wrapped content in a dreamless sleep.

IF.

IF through the creeping grayness of the years
The thought of one bright hour loved of us twain,
Smile like the glad face of a flower that peers
Out of the twilight, it was not in vain
That we were one in laughter and in tears.

SPRING SONG.

SPRING winds and a wild unrest,
Spring songs and a vague regret
Spring flowers and a blind desire!

Swift feet, you have put to shame
The rushing winds as they came;
White throat, there is never a bird
Can vie with your lightest word;
Red lips, when you deign to smile
The flowers are humbled awhile.

Ah, girl! have you never guessed
Why mine is the wind's unrest?
Why the sound of my voice is set
To the tune of a vague regret?
For this—in my heart like fire
Is the knowledge of blind desire!

O—KAME.

WOE is me, my lord is wrath,
I am humbled in his path
As the field-grass low-inclined
To an icy-cutting wind.

Since I am no puny thing,
Cringing low and whimpering,
Nor a weakling thrall to fears
Pale with sighs and blotched with tears,

I shall bear me laughingly,
Set my shining tresses free,
Parted slightly—long ago
He was pleased to praise me so;

Think me what soft fabric best
Will reveal the curved breast;
Pearl nor tourmaline, nor gem,
Shall be found from neck to hem.

As he passes on his way,
I shall lean me out and say
Some sweet, tender, joyous thing,
Make my honeyed laughter sing

From curled lips incarnadine
Such a song will warm like wine,
Till my lord at sight of me
Snatch me to him amorously.

He is gone! Nor smile, nor frown
Casting on me laughing down!
Had he struck me with his sword,
Lashed me with some bitter word,

Stormed upon me, bade me hide
From his sight my beauty's pride,
I could find the heart to smile
Saying, "In a little while

All his anger will be spent."
But of this strange wrath in-pent
I know nothing. Lo! ignored,
Passed unheeded of my lord!

Swiftly now indeed alack!
How the blood beats back and back,
Leaving all my pulses cold,
I am suddenly waxed old;

Worn and grey, deflowered with grief,
As an autumn-ravished leaf;
Stricken as a naked tree,
When the sun sets wintrily;

Like a sadly rusted sword,
Dreaming of the days my lord,
Laughing low with tender pride,
Held me warm against his side.

RONDEAU.

WERE you a Rose my eager feet
Would bear me to you far more fleet
Than any breeze that ever blew;
I'd kiss you as the zephyrs do
The flowers in the noonday heat.
Ah, could my bliss be so complete,
How every throbbing pulse would beat
With joyousness the whole day through,
Were you a Rose!

Then would I take as only meet
The favors I must now entreat,
For ere I dreamed of wooing you
All beauteous there with honey-dew
I'd rob you of your thorns, my sweet,
Were you a Rose!

JULY MORNING.

THE Sky leans downwards to the Sea,
The Sea strains upwards to the Sky;
And while men live and love and die,
These cling together passionately.

And Silence with seductive Sound
Is wedded, while within our sight
The Shadows amorous of the Light,
Stretch suppliant arms along the ground.

The Rain has kissed the tender Grass
Until the tentative pale tips,
In dumb response to those moist lips
Make vivid splendour where we pass;

And with her shining breast laid bare,
The Woodland lies beneath the Sun,
All glorious-wise about her spun,
Love's glamour as it caught her there.

So is the scheme of things made plain
On this fair morning of July!
A subtle meaning in the Sky,
An artless whisper from the Rain.

SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR.

How Nature on such days as this,
Unguarded for a little span,
Reveals her ancient secret plan,
That all things grow toward a kiss!

WANDERLUST.

THERE'S a mystic siren call floating inward from
the sea,
An unknown seductive Love ever lures and
beckons me,
And my restless feet must follow, for they have no other
choice .
'Neath the subtle sweet allurements of that wild compelling
voice.

(Ah, dear lass, the billows shimmer
As the radiant sun appears,
And I cannot heed the glimmer
In your eyes of unshed tears.)

Tho' full many a bitter fruit has been garnered by her
hand,
Yet this strange, elusive Love draws me outward from
the land—
In her hair the tang of seaweed, in her widely mocking
eyes,
Lie the spell of open spaces, and the warmth of Southern
skies.

SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR.

(Ah, dear lass, your red lips clinging
Can no longer hold me fast,
For my mouth has felt the stinging
Kiss of sea winds as they passed!)

A CHILD'S SONG.

WHAT than earth and sea
Mightier can there be?
Love that covers me!

Since I know no guile
All things all the while
Stoop to see me smile.

Why does Grief come, pray?
Only so Love may
Kiss the tears away.

They that gave me birth
Count of little worth,
Play and song and mirth.

More than seven times seven
Joy on earth is given;
What's the worth of Heaven?

ALAS! LOVE CAME.

ALAS! Love came on mightily plumed wings,
Swift rushing as the wind. So madly sweet
The proof of many things
Shone in his eyes, that all the hot blood beat
Out from the little hollow of the throat,
And rioted in wanton fierce glee,
Burning through every limb. Such joy I had
To feel our bodies touching amorously,
His breathing made me glad!
But that was in a time and place remote,
When Love and I sprang from the earth primordial
Yet haply till the free,
Glad face of Death smile through the crepuscule,
This shall have part in me!

CLOTHO.

TURN, strange wheel!
Let the gossamer threads fly free,
And none may guess whether woe or weal
Are running swift from the humming reel,
For Mystery long has laid her seal
On the lips of the sisters three.

Long, long years
Have bowed us under their weight.
Implacable Atropos wields her shears,
Lachesis heeds neither smiles nor tears,
I the youngest have hopes and fears,
Clotho the star-crowned fate.

Gold, red gold
And silver the filaments twine.
Is it strange that my heart and my hands are cold,
When the fatal fibre of black is enrolled,
Ere ever the thread is a moment old,
Like the blight on a budding vine.

SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR.

Once begun

To the spinning wheel low I bend,
Yet of all the webs from my distaff spun,
Thro' the dimlit eons is never a one,
Has reached fulfilment and flawless run,
From beginning unto the end.

Spin, spin, spin

With your maddening, passionless face,
Lachesis deaf to the shuttle's din,
Blind to sorrow, untouched of sin,
Guiding the destinies out and in
With never a resting space.

TO HIS BETROTHED.

WE are here in the valley grown over with bracken,
Out of the world's way, hid for a space
Where the sunbeams soften, the wind's feet
 slacken,
And all things grow to a tender grace.
Only the voice of a mating thrush
Thrills and quickens the wildwood hush,
And forgot are the dust and the smoke that blacken
The distant grey of the city's face.

We are here with the eucalypt trees about us,
Light and shade and a bird that sings.
Can sunbeams mock us or shadows flout us
If we have speech of the mighty things
Whispered furtively, hidden of men?
Must thought between us be stifled when
We twain together (the world without us)
Are sure of love as a bird of wings?

They would have me woo you, caress you, hold you
Warm in my arms as a bird in its nest;
But they would not, sweet, that I ever told you
My mouth's hot longing to kiss your breast!

SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR.

They would have me lie to you, trick and cheat,
Wrap you round with a blind deceit,
Then tear asunder what dreams enfold you
And leave you stricken and sore distressed.

They would dole for lovers a daily ration
Of long caresses and lips kissed red,
And slow sweet whispers in lovers' fashion,
But never a word of the one thing said
—Fine and wondrous that gave us breath
Stronger, crueller far than death—
Not one word spoken of lovers' passion
Till Love lay slain on her bridal bed.

We have chosen and promised us one to another,
Have seen the splendour of Love's own face.
And we, should we strive to stifle and smother,
Because the lovers of earth debase,
With wanton laughter and jest profane,
The thing most holy between us twain?
Is there aught, my sweet, that one from the other
Should hide for even a moment's space?

O woman of mine, let us draw more nearly
Our thoughts together in love's sweet name;
O lips turned softly, O mouth wrought dearly,
Can speech between us have space for shame?

O dream incarnate, O chosen mate,
There are many ways that a man may hate,
But the manner of loving is fashioned clearly,
Keen and clean as a leaping flame.

AUTUMN SONG.

THE gaunt trees naked and sear
Are bowed at fall of the year,
For the Autumn wind is here,
Singing a haunting funeral song
To the skeleton leaves as they flit along
In a silent, stricken, eddying throng.

He sings of death and of swift decay,
And the loves forgotten of yesterday.

Be still mad wind, be still!
Go rest thee now in the yellow bracken,
Or sing thy song to the shades that blacken
The hollow under the hill.
The sound of thee is too sad for me;
I am in thrall to a memory!

The tentative trickling rain
Falls in a silver chain,
Where the rotting leaves have lain;
Scintillant filaments twine and gleam
In and out in an endless stream
Till the wood deflowered is a jewelled dream.

And the rain sings low to a world forlorn
Of Spring and laughter and loves unborn.

O whispering rain, be still,
Or hie thee swift with thy garments clinging,
Haply the trees will welcome such singing
Out on the wind-swept hill.
Loves to be have no charm for me;
I am in thrall to a memory!

TO A BED OF RED SALVIA.

IN splendid riot, roseate with glee,
Incarnadine with laughter!—'Neath that wave
Of joyous scarlet, tho' you look so brave,
What is the wound you hide thus carefully?

THE SEA.

THE Sea is a radiant Child,
With sunflecked eyes, and with laughter borrowed
From haply the wind and the rain;
So seeing her face we would fain
Forget that we and the world have sorrowed
And striven and travailed in vain.

The Sea is a ghastly Corse,
All grey and sodden and dank and leaden
In a winding sheet of mist,
And an icy blast has hissed
And howled aloud of the fruits forbidden
That her haggard lips have kissed.

The Sea is an Eastern Queen,
In purple samite, with gems enhancing
The lustrous dark of her hair;
White throat and bosom bare,
And the haughty sweep of her proud eyes glancing
On treasures rich and rare.

SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR.

The Sea is a wanton Fiend,
She lured my love with her beck and smiles,
And her siren singing sweet,
Then with mocking laughter, fleet
She bore him homeward a thousand miles,
And laid him dead at my feet.

MISCHA ELMAN.

ALL sense of pleasure and all sense of pain
Dropped in a whisper as of falling rain;

And dolorous as the moaning of the sea,
Passion outpouring in a melody;

Delight and knowledge, joy and keen desire
Swept upward as a clean, straight flame of fire;

And sudden laughter, as the silver feet
Of wind on water gleaming, but more fleet;

Tears and the tenderness that lovers bear
Wrought softer than the flowing of the air;

And in this web of woven subtlety
A wizard, caught in his own wizardry!

IN A GARDEN.

PITTOSPORUMS flung their scent with wanton
hands

Into the tresses of the summer night;
And as the breezes blew the perfumed strands
Across her face, she swooned for sheer delight.

The moonlight lay as softly on the flowers
As tender kisses dropped on sleeping eyes,
And cast a spell upon the fleeting hours,
Turning our laughter ere we knew to sighs.

A cactus flower from its dark foil of green
Gleamed like a pearl in some dim ocean bed;
And slender aloes thrust their spires between
The jacaranda's purple and hibiscus' red.

And all the while the hidden crickets sent
Such little passionate thriddings from the grass
We fancied that the hooded night had bent
To whisper to us ere she let us pass.

So we who did not know her mystic power,
Nor dreamed yet of the subtle web she wove,
Made foolish vows we could not keep an hour,
Trembled and laughed and kissed—and called it love!

IMMUTABLE.

SWEET Syrinx liquid voice is stilled,
And Pan himself long since is dead;
No cloven-footed Satyrs tread
An ambush in the long, lush grass,
To watch the wide-eyed Dryads pass,
Or leaping laugh to see them filled
With madd'ning terror as they fly.

But could the shaggy wood-god wake
Again to his Arcadian task
Of piping, you would see the mask
That I have smiling worn so long
Drop at the prelude to his song,
And we should speed through glade and brake
A Dryad you—a Satyr I!

GREYCLIFFE.

GREYCLIFFE, laid in a slumbrous hollow,
Set like a gem on the harbor's rim,
With fair green spaces and glimmer of sand;
And fleeter far than the eye can follow,
The silver feet of the winds that skim
O'er the breast of the bay to the heart of the land!

The bay, like a curving pearl-shell fluted
At edge where the wreathed ripples break,
Is wrought in opal and mother-of-pearl;
And beyond, where the dolorous rocks stand rooted,
Impassive and sombre, the waters make
A hyaline green as they rear and curl.

Greycliffe, tender and gracious and mellow,
Dreaming there in the light of the sun,
Covered and clad in his glamorous sheen!
The bed of the creek is lush and yellow
With flowering cress; and shadowy run
The patches of blue-grass in with the green.

Greycliffe, Greycliffe, the season passes!
Will you remember when we forget
The splendid passionate ichor of Spring?
The long embrace in the cold, clean grasses?
The mouth and body and spirit met?
The sheer delight of a kiss's sting?

Greycliffe, Greycliffe, When we no longer
Are moved to rapture at Spring's swift birth,
From leafy stirring to vernal fret—
When Death and the fates than Love prove stronger,
When all things fade that we loved of earth,
Will you remember though we forget?

TRIOLET.

THIS love so cherished of us twain
 Will hold its beauty through the years;
 'Tis like a murmured sweet refrain,
This love so cherished of us twain.
Since each to each through sun and rain
 Runs unafraid with hopes and fears,
This love so cherished of us twain
 Will hold its beauty through the years.

YOUTH.

SINCE I must live, God send me not for life
A thing of neutral tint and monotone!
Purple with grief perchance, and loud with strife,
So it befit a man, I'll make no moan.

Since I must die, may Death lay hold on me,
Hot from the stress and clamor of the strife;
So will I yield me to him joyously,
Deeper my rest for having striven with Life!

PROOF-READERS.

WE sit all day, my mate and I,
With wan eyes fixed on proof and screed,
While all the world goes streaming by
In mad procession as we read.

With wan eyes fixed on proof and screed,
Ah, who would guess the things we see
In mad procession, as we read
From morn till night unceasingly?

Ah, who would guess the things we see?
The loves and lives of all the earth,
From morn till night unceasingly—
Their tragedies and dreams and mirth!

The loves and lives of all the earth,
We murmur in a lifeless drone;
Their tragedies and dreams and mirth
Are tempered to a monotone.

We murmur in a lifeless drone;
The throbbing linotypes below
Are tempered to a monotone;
The copy boys run to and fro.

The throbbing linotypes below,
With us are neither sad nor gay;
The copy boys run to and fro,
My mate and I no haste display.

With us are neither sad nor gay
The deeds of men and clowns and kings;
My mate and I no haste display,
Tho' the world laughs or weeps or sings.

The deeds of men and clowns and kings
(Through dreams and hopes and fears disproved,
Though the world laughs or weeps or sings)
We watch with weary eyes unmoved.

Through dreams and hopes and fears disproved,
We sit all day, my mate and I;
We watch with weary eyes, unmoved,
While all the world goes streaming by.

A VISION.

LO! Like a purple flower, shedding in wanton shower
 Petals of violet mist;
 Night of her royal dower, flings from a jewelled
 bower
 Shadows of amethyst.

And at the Night's behest, I of a dream obsessed,
 See you a crescent moon,
Curved with a star at rest, soft on your rounded breast
 Almost I hear you croon!

THE RETURN.

THE wattle has unbound her yellow hair,
Making such golden mist upon the air,
The little breezes breathless with delight
Pass her a-tip-toe lest she take to flight,
And suddenly the sleeping scrub is stirred
By the low liquid whistle of a mating bird.

Now straight upon my mouth, I feel the sting
Anew of kisses from a long-dead Spring,
When with primordial lover's hot desire
My heart turned molten with consuming fire.
Ah, who can guess what dream primeval stirred
At the low liquid whistle of a mating bird?

Up from the swamp the keening wild duck fly
(A pencil-stroke on a blank-canvas sky),
And rushing comes a wind from out the East,
Made drunken with the wine of Freedom's feast,
And mocking from the mangroves by the creek,
Lashes your loosened hair across my cheek.

And I! I am gone out on the wind's wing,
Back to the days when I with him could fling
Lawless high laughter, from a mighty throat;
And you are but a vision, dim, remote,
As old nomadic longings leap and strain
At the wind's call, making me theirs again.

AN IMITATION.

COME, let us take life as a singing bird,
Whose liquid voice in early Spring is heard
Pregnant with rapture from some burgeoning tree,
Till every pulse to ecstasy is stirred.

The joyous bird that never questions why
His song will be forgotten bye and bye.
Ah, would we only carol carelessly,
We could sing passing sweetly, you and I.

Come, let us take life as the laughing rose,
Who never cares, and haply never knows
How swiftly and elusive as the wind,
The Summer's golden glamor comes and goes.

The rose for whom no passing hours are told,
Save as her petals from their sleep unfold.
Why cannot we leave days and years behind
And count by kisses till our hearts grow cold?

Come, let us greet death as the stately night
Of gracious shadow and of splendid light,
Who underneath her great empurpled wing
Hides the dumb bird and leafless rose from sight.

SONGS OF THE OPEN AIR.

When we have sung our little roundelay
And kissed the moments and our love away,
Then let us seek out death,—some little thing
Of beauty may arise from our dead clay.

RAIN.

THE darkling streets are wet with rain
That murmurs in a monotone,
And drums upon the window pane
With clammy fingers restless grown.

And yellow through the blowing mist
The lights show strangely blurred and dim,
With aureoles of amethyst
Hung lightly on their circles' rim.

While weeping wildly for a space,
Yet half-ashamed of foolish fears,
The city drops about her face
A misty veil to hide her tears.

And spread beneath the leaden sky
The harbour lies a wan grey waste,
Where phantom steamers rustle by
With hissing whispers as they haste.

Yet I can laugh and hold it good,
Because of that one day we twain,
In tenderness of lovers' mood,
Found joy in walking through the rain.

WOODBURN HEATH.

THE Spring has come to Woodburn Heath
With joyous eyes and honeyed breath,
And scattered broadcast wealth untold
Of pink and gold.

The purple sarsaparilla hung
Upon the bracken she has flung,
In wanton prodigality
And careless glee.

And of her largesse wattle-trees
Fling golden bounty to the breeze,
That dances singing as it comes
Of scented gums.

Here the boronia flowers crowd
In radiant host, and as a cloud
Incarnadine at dawning, glows
The native rose.

The bloodwood capsules dry and brown
Make pungent perfume dropping down;
The bottle-brush's stately head
Is decked with red.

All sweetly flushed is Woodburn Heath
As a maid's cheek, where underneath
The tender brown of wind and sun
The red veins run.

And shining from her joyous face
Is nought but artless vernal grace.
They lie who say you met your death
On Woodburn Heath!

SO WE WHO LIVE.

SO we, who live and laugh and weep,
And deem our love a deathless thing,
Soon will be lying fast asleep,
Deaf to the haunting winds that sing
Of joyous Spring.

And those your lips upraised to mine,
Like laughing flowers to the light;
And these my arms that round you twine
To shield you from the loathly blight
Of Death's sad night;

And this your body subtly sweet,
Ere long will be but mould and must,
When these hot hearts of ours, that beat
Against each other will be just
Insentient dust.

There is no dearer fiercer thing
Than this our life of hopes and fears;
Swift as a swallow on the wing,
Fickle as love that sways and veers
With changing years.

Nothing more joyous nor more sad
Than but to live and then to die!
Earth, with its little flowers; the glad
Sweet ways of windswept sea and sky,
Then lethargy.

Can we do more—can we do less
Than love and laugh and haply weep,
And vainly striving, blindly guess
At what lies hidden, till we creep
At last to sleep?

SONG OF THE SLUM-WOMAN.

THE baby and the rubbish-bin are huddled side by side,
I'm gettin' through the washin', and the yard is not too wide;
'N when you come to think of it, it doesn't seem quite square
For the baby 'n the rubbish-bin to sit together there.

Of course there's room enough for 'im to play upon the street
(Next door but one, a kid got crushed beneath an 'orse's feet);
'E sits quite good 'n quiet, 'n 'e never starts to whine
Till 'is eyes get sort of achy with the flappin' on the line.

There is 'Ospitals for Women, 'n there's Infants' 'Omes as well,
'N the Walker Convalescent you can rest in for a spell.
'It 'd be a deal sight cheaper than the nurse, 'n bed, 'n ward
If the Council 'd provide us with a decent-sized back-yard.

For there's Billy down with fever, 'n there's Janie got
sore eyes,

'N 'Ector, though 'e's turned fifteen, 'e isn't any size.

Yet they fill us up with Charity in 'Ospitals 'n all!

Won't anybody tell 'em they're against a bloomin' wall?

If they'd start from the beginnin' like, with rentals on the
square

'N pull these rotten houses down, 'n 'elp us get fresh air,

If they'd see we got conveniences—not much, just what
we need—

Why they'd have both feet on sickness, 'fore it 'ad the
chance to breed!

But the baby 'n the rubbish-bin are huddled side by side,
I'm gettin' through the washin', and the yard is not too
wide.

There's the Parliament 'n Premier 'n the grand Lord
Mayor, too—

It kind o' sets you wond'rin' what they all intend to do!

SONNETS.

JANUARY.

HER tyrant lord, the Summer, bids her bear
Twain of his lusty children thro' the heat,
And as she creeps along with listless feet
And eyes half-blinded by the noon-day glare,
The moisture of her temples makes her hair
Cling to her brow in little tendrils meet
For kisses, while her languid pulses beat
Ever more faint upon the swooning air.

For this with sudden tenderness, her lord
Holds her within his arms the whole night through,
Charming her sleep with amorous whispers borne
On scented breezes. Yet ere day has scored
The East with flame, he bids her rise anew
Panting beneath her load to face the morn.

FEBRUARY.

THE Rains are coming! February leans
Above the land with slender hands embrowned
Curved to her joyous lips' carnation round
And shouts the message to the parched ravines.
And tho' from sight the blackened grass-tree screens
The ravished heath and white-hot plain, the sound
Quickens with eager dreams the scorching ground
And wakens dead desire of luscious greens.

Now swift like rushing brumbies come the rains
Churning the creeks and bowing down the grass;
The gipsy month laughs low to see them near
With flying feet and sweeping silver manes,
Then fearless-eyed leaps lightly as they pass
And rides upon the foremost down the year.

MARCH.

ON the lush flats and reedy swamps again
The slender ibis goes upon its way.
The freshened creeks that swell the rivers, sway
With hyacinth set moving by the rain
That splashed the faded scrubland with a stain
Of vivid green. And through the humid day
The steam arises of the leaves' decay
To tell of Summer's glory on the wane.

For she has served her purpose, and the year
Puts her aside. So statelily she goes
That none would guess what passionate tears she
shed
To find her charm grown colorless and sere;
November led her from a sapling close,
April will find the splendid Summer dead!

APRIL.

CAROLS the magpie, "Lo, again 'tis Spring!"
For tipped with green is each pittosporum tree,
And on the heath, boronias pink with glee
Laugh to the sun, and on the breezes fling
Their pungent scent. A swift kingfisher's wing
Is not more purple-green than gleams the sea,
Yet like a sad word dropped unwittingly,
The wind blows keenly with a sudden sting.

The year's decline with you has had no part,
O autumn April with the vernal face.
Is it a compact you have made with Time,
Or haply did you steal the golden heart
Of some great woman, so with mellow grace
You might slip all unnoticed past your prime?

MAY.

THE chokos on the vine are turning white,
And sunset skies forego their vivid hues
For tender pinks and pastel greys and blues;
The black swans have begun their winter flight
That bears them keening through the sombre night;
While in the long grass dank with heavy dew
The mating snakes creep silently in twos,
And winds go moaning as in sudden fright.

Running comes May with cheeks a little pale
And hair the wind has blown across her eyes,
Her flying feet set rustling all the sere
Dead leaves that mark autumnal April's trail,
And as she speeds, with sobbing breath she cries,
"Alas! The winter is already here!"

JUNE.

THE shivering dawn arising drenched with dew
From out the mangroves by the river, gropes
Among thick draperies of fog, and opes
The door of day to let the high noon through,
Who like an Eastern queen steps into view
Gleaming with gold and hung with jewelled ropes,
And where enamelled saplings deck the slopes
Passes with trailing samite robes of blue.

But soon her splendid vividness is lost
In a swift chill the early evening brings.
Low on the ti-trees hangs a veil of smoke
And all the air grows sharp with coming frost
Till, with a sudden movement, Nature flings
The night about her shoulders as a cloak.

JULY.

THE fig-leaves fall before the wind in showers—
A cutting wind that rushes from the West—
The snow lies thick on Kosciusko's breast,
And on the coast the twisted ti-tree cowers
Before the rain. Lo! In an instant bowers
Are filled with sunshine as at Spring's behest,
And in a vision, August, golden-tressed,
Passes with joyous arms weighed down with flowers.

July is like an adolescent youth
That wakes the echoes with his boisterous shouts,
And then falls dreaming for a sudden space
Lost in a maze 'twixt wonder and the truth
Because of joy and strange desires and doubts
That move him at a passing maiden's face.

AUGUST.

WHO can have robbed the winter of its sting
And tipped the stately bottle-brush with red,
And set the pee-wee calling overhead?

Who is it speeds on dancing feet to bring
The scented brown boronia and to fling
The sarsaparilla on the bracken bed,
And seeing that the blue-wren fain would wed
Splashes a deeper purple on his wing?

Oh! It is August, singing by the creek
And flitting to and fro upon the heath,
With busy fingers and bewitching ways
Of darting here and there at hide and seek
To please her babe, the Spring, who underneath
A leafy shelter with a wild-flower plays.

SEPTEMBER.

O H, here are orchids, green and mauve and white,
Kissed by the shadow of the turpentine,
And here the scarlet desert-peas entwine
With warm caress, the vernal saplings bright
And slender; suppliant, straining toward the light,
The pink epacris rears a starry spine;
The day is like a bowl of golden wine
And drowsy with pittosporums is the night.

Thus is the scheme of things so long
A mystery, laid before us for a space
Devoid of all its ancient artifice,
September trills it in an artless song,
Bearing the simple message in her face
That all things earthly grow toward a kiss.

OCTOBER.

THIS is a wayward maid of changing mood,
A beauteous wanton prone to smiles and tears;
Now from beneath bright, cruel brows she peers
And strikes upon the West wind with a crude
Rough hand; and now a melting interlude
She pipes upon the South, to charm the ears
Of Spring, her lover, who with hopes and fears
A thousand treasures on her path has strewed.

How beautiful and faithless! With her lips
—Where yet September's vernal kisses cling—
Curled amorously to lure the Summer on!
She passes swiftly, smiling as she slips
Into her ardent new love's arms. And Spring,
With many a stricken backward glance, is gone!

NOVEMBER.

SWIFT have cicadas wakened through the land,
With endless thridding; every mangrove creek
Teems with a myriad crabs, that ravenous seek
To stay their hunger in the oozy sand,
While shrill mosquitoes in a noisy band
Hanging above the waterholes bespeak
The Summer time; and countless parrots streak
The scrub with vivid red on either hand.

So now her offspring spawned and harvests done,
Nothing more splendid can the year attain,
And resting for a little space she lies
Stretched at full length beneath the scorching sun,
With flanks still heaving from her travail pain
And calm of great achievement in her eyes.

DECEMBER.

A SPLENDID maid, bareheaded in the light,
Whose warm brown skin and hot imperious ways
Hold men enthralled and listless with amaze
To find such undimmed beauty in their sight!
But thrice seductive is she when at night
She flings aside the noontide's shimmering haze
And show'rs her scented tresses, all ablaze
With starry gems, down from the purple height.

And now we see her wading through the creek;
Now on the beaches gleaming in the curl
Of half-turned breakers; now with burnished feet
Spurning the plains;—and yet we need but seek
In scrub and gully for this radiant girl
To find her drowsing, exquisitely sweet!

CANBERRA.

SHE, who should bear her as a bounteous queen,
Like some poor suppliant beggar maiden stands
Out on the barren plain, with empty hands;
No flashing jewelled stream with silver sheen
Girdles her waist, but in its stead a mean
Brown belt of stagnant waterholes. And lands
Far distant will make mock to see thick bands
Of dust, where a bright fillet should have been.

Haply the years, with cunning fingers, swift
Will weave this beggar maid a costly gown
Of borrowed splendour, and to deck her hair
Will bring a flashing diadem for gift.
Yet though she wear fine raiment and a crown
What power can make a barren woman bear?

WAR VERSES.

SOCKS.

TWO plain, purl two,
It's little else a woman can do
But bear sons and watch them grow,
Till marching out of her life they go.

Knit five, purl one,
I doubt if ever a mother's son
In war's cause hacked and cleft,
Knows half the hurt of the woman that's left.

Slip one, purl eight,
There's nothing left but to hope and wait,
And the seven tasks of Hercules
Would count as little compared with these.

Turn, slip, then the heel,
Out of sorrow comes haply weal,
But fair times are far away,
And there's many weep for their men to-day.

Cast off, the thing's done!
Many a husband and many a son
Find death in hapless war,
Nor ever know what they fought it for.

Two plain, purl two,
It's little else a woman can do
But bear sons and watch them grow,
Till marching out of her life they go.

A TOAST.

CHARGE your glasses and drink to the dead!
Our dead, whatever their birthplace be,
Who have fought and suffered that such as we
Might live our little lives oversea.
Pledge a toast to the memory
Of the brave blood shed!

Lift your glasses and let the toast pass!
Yet haply if at the board there be
One who has taken his liberty
And paid no tithe of the nation's fee
In coin or labour or sons, 'tis he
Must lower his glass!

COLORED BOWS.

(Women at the Royal Naval House At Homes wear colored bows to signify to which boats their men belong.)

THE cruisers and destroyers have borne our men
away;
Perhaps ten thousand miles divide our men from us
to-day.

They may be in the North Sea, they may be near at hand,
We only know for certain that we wish them safe on land.

O it's red for the Australia,
The little Penguin's blue,
It's white for the Encounter
And the Sydney's purple hue;

But it's black, plain black if your husband or your son
Went out of Sydney Harbor in the AE1.

'We're not afraid of hardships, and we're not the sort to
shirk,
If the pay we get is not enough, we simply look for work;
And some have gone to service to raise an extra pound
To put towards a cottage or perhaps a piece of ground.

So it's not the fear of struggling with hunger at the door,
And it isn't that we're lonely—we've been through that
before!

But it breaks a woman's spirit when there's trouble for
her mate,
And for her the helpless knowledge she can only work
and wait.

O it's red for the Australia,
The little Penguin's blue,
It's white for the Encounter
And the Sydney's purple hue;

But it's black, plain black if your husband or your son
Went out of Sydney Harbor in the AE1.

JANUARY 27.

(The great effort of the Germans in the western theatre of war to celebrate the Kaiser's birthday, resulted for them in a loss of 20,000 men.)

HE crept upon the nations and robbed them of their
peace,
From John o' Groats to Capetown, and round and
back again;

And his underlings foreseeing that his lust would never
cease,

Brought a gift upon his birthday of twenty thousand
men.

On Belgium in her ancient integrity and pride

He sprang with maw rapacious, as a beast from out
its den;

And his hirelings hasting to him ere the blood of Belgium
dried,

Brought a gift upon his birthday of twenty thousand
men.

Since the villages and hamlets and the town of fair
Louvain

All agonised were not enough to glut his hunger then,
The myrmidons that serve him and bear the brand of Cain
Brought a gift upon his birthday of twenty thousand
men.

To him who gazed already on a wild sea of blood,
That flowed from more than twenty thousand multiplied by ten,
His cringing creatures striving to swell the sickening flood,
Brought a gift upon his birthday of twenty thousand men.

But when a nation's honor had done him sacrifice
And the blood of babes and women was not beyond his ken,
Why it was meet for laughter, a thing of little price,
This gift upon his birthday of twenty thousand men!

THE FOSTER MOTHERS.*

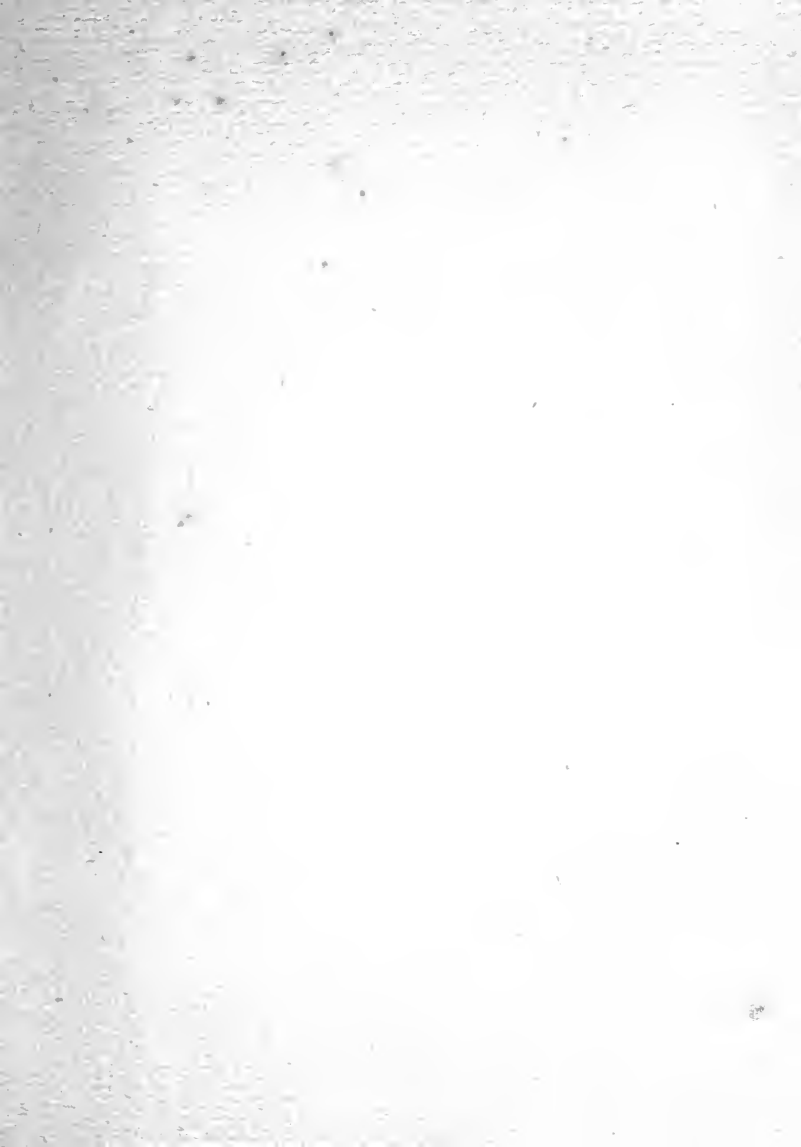
WHAT little limbs will be sheltered warm
By the garments wee that are taking form,
Swiftly wrought by the eager hands
Of tender women in sunnier lands?

What small body will lie at rest,
Hidden away in a cosy nest,
Woven firm and yet tenderly
By foster-mothers across the sea?

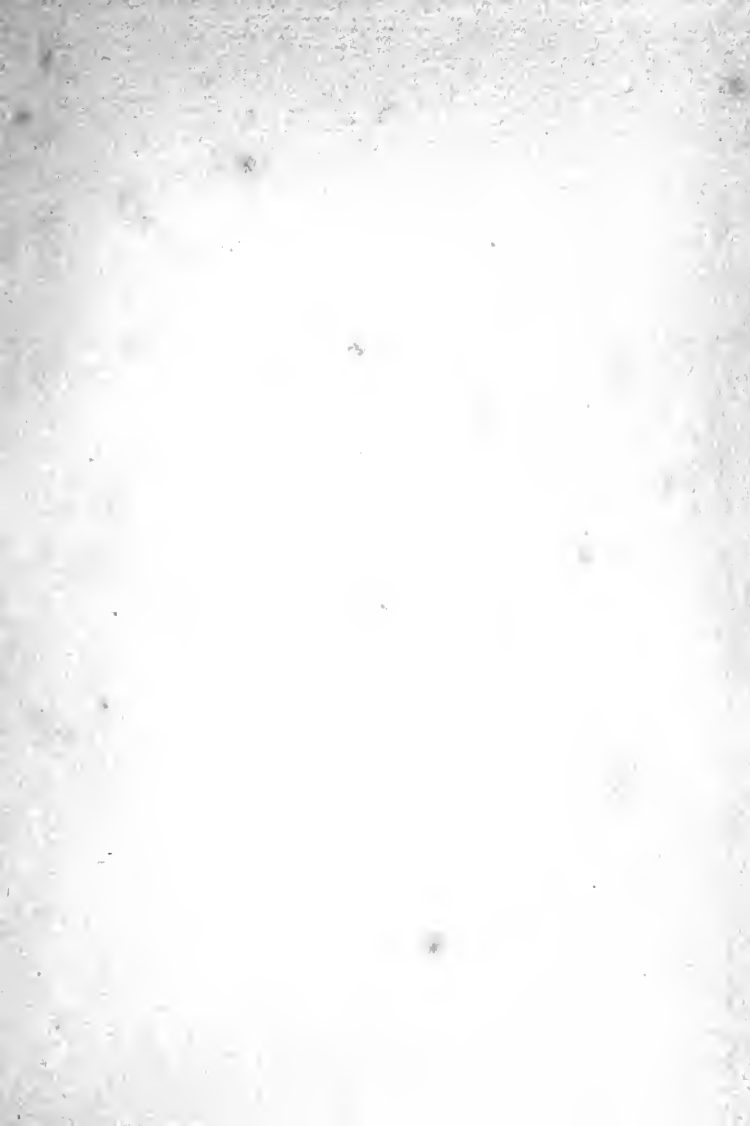
What little eyes will take on a hue
Brighter still for the stitchings blue,
That stranger-fingers by pity swayed,
Have touched and worked in a colored braid?

Whom do they mother there as they sew?
They care as little indeed as they know,
But turn with a naive simplicity
To the lot ordained them at Fate's decree.

(*At the Belgian Babies' Kit Depot.)











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